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CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL

NATIONAL CENTER FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Division of Viral and Rickettsial Diseases

Hepatitis B Prevention and Pregnancy



How to protect
your baby against
hepatitis B

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious disease of the liver caused by hepatitis B virus, or HBV. All people—no matter how old they are or where they live—may be at risk for hepatitis B.

HBV attacks and destroys the liver, which is such an important organ that you cannot live without it.

Hepatitis B may cause

- scarring (cirrhosis) of the liver
- liver cancer
- lifelong (chronic) HBV infection
- liver failure
- death

Why is hepatitis B a problem for pregnant women and their babies?

Pregnant women may have HBV in their blood without knowing it and can pass it on to their babies at birth. Many of these babies develop lifelong HBV



infections and can pass the virus on to others throughout their lives. At first, babies may not look or feel sick, but as they grow up, they may have liver damage. About 25% of babies who develop lifelong HBV infections die of liver disease or liver cancer.

How can you get hepatitis B?

HBV is spread from person to person by direct contact with infected blood or body fluids. Even small amounts of infected blood can cause infection.

HBV infection can be spread by

- an infected mother to her baby during birth
- sharing needles for injecting drugs
- having sex with an infected person

You are at increased risk for hepatitis B if

- you live in the same household with someone who has lifelong HBV infection
- you have a job that exposes you to human blood

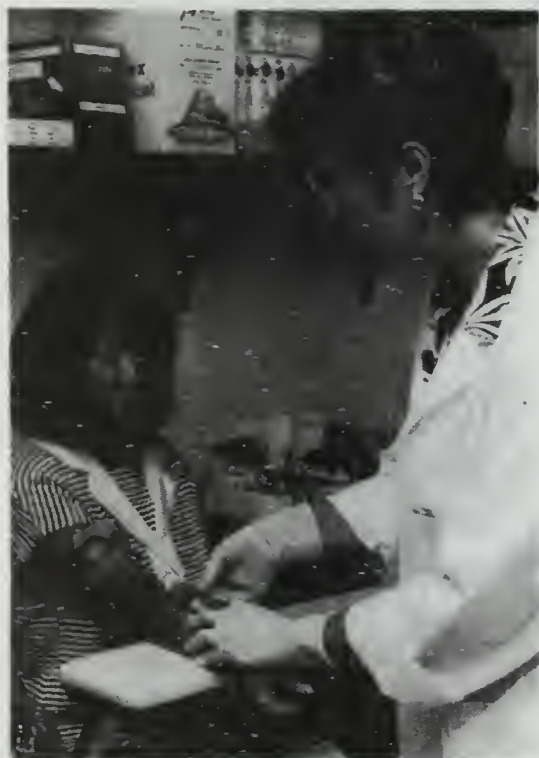
If you feel healthy, can you still have hepatitis B?

Some people who have hepatitis B have no symptoms and may not know they are infected. Others who are infected with HBV never fully recover and carry the virus in their blood for the rest of their lives. These people are known as carriers, and they can infect other household and sexual contacts throughout their lives.

How do you find out if you have hepatitis B?

Get a blood test at your clinic or doctor's office.

All pregnant women should get a blood test for hepatitis early in their pregnancy.



If the test is positive, the doctor or nurse will tell you how to take care of yourself and how to prevent infecting your baby and others.

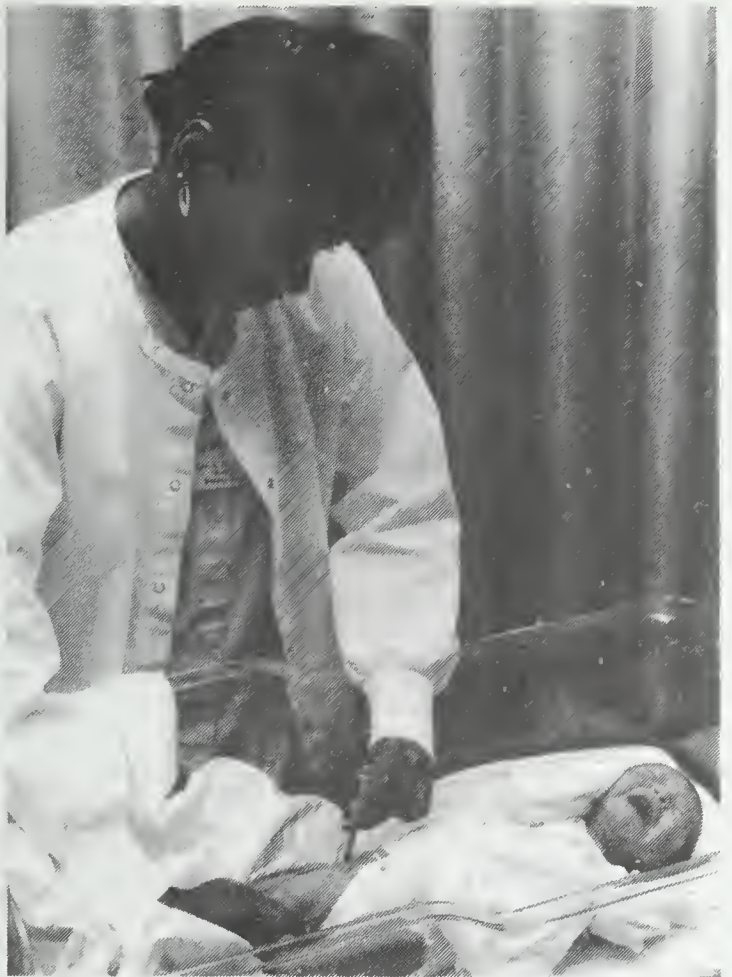
How do you protect your baby if your hepatitis B blood test is positive?

A safe vaccine has been used since 1982 to prevent hepatitis B. The vaccine is given in a series of three shots. If you have HBV infection, your baby will get the first shot within 12 hours of birth, along with another shot, hepatitis B immune globulin. The next two shots of hepatitis B vaccine will be given along with other baby shots. All other members of your household should get a blood test for hepatitis B. If the blood test is negative, hepatitis B vaccine should be given to the other household members.

Do you need to protect your baby if the hepatitis B blood test is negative?

Hepatitis B vaccination is recommended for all infants to protect them from becoming infected with HBV. If your blood test for hepatitis B is negative, your baby will still

Hepatitis
B virus
infection
is easily
prevented
by
vaccination.



receive the hepatitis B vaccine series with other baby shots, but will not need a shot of hepatitis B immune globulin. The baby may get the first shot either before leaving the hospital or with the first baby shots at the doctor's office or clinic. Ask your doctor or nurse when the next shots need to be given.

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Protect Your Baby Against Hepatitis B

- Get a blood test
- Vaccinate your baby

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For more information on hepatitis B and pregnancy,
contact your local health department or call the
CDC Hepatitis Hotline (404) 332-4555

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